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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KATHMANDU 000439

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SA/INS
LONDON FOR POL/GURNEY
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TAGS: [MCAP](#) [MOPS](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [NP](#)

SUBJECT: NEPAL:AMBASSADOR'S VISIT TO VILLAGE DEFENSE
COMMITTEE

REF: A. A) US DAO KATHMANDU IIR 6 867 0043 03 (NOTAL)
[1](#)B. B) US DAO KATHMANDU 03 IIR 6 867 0028 03 (NOTAL)

Classified By: Ambassador Michael E. Malinowski for reasons 1.5 (B, D).

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SUMMARY
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[1](#)1. (SBU) In an effort better to understand Nepal's controversial, new "Village Defense Committees," Ambassador Malinowski and the Defense Attache on March 2 visited by helicopter one of the Royal Nepal Army's (RNA) pilot projects located in Lamjung District (in a remote area northeast of Pokhara). Within the Nepalese government and the international donor and non-governmental organization community there has been much debate on the RNA's concept for helping the civilian population to defend itself against Maoist depredations. Despite many fears and misrepresentations, the project visited functions like a "neighborhood watch," involving retired British/Indian Gurkha officers carrying their own licensed weapons, like shotguns (NOTE: The RNA indicates that they have not provided villagers with any military-grade weapons. END NOTE.) Currently, the RNA has established just two such "Village Defense Committees" in Lamjung and Sarlahi Districts. END SUMMARY.

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Lamjung Village Defense Committee
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[1](#)2. (C) On March 2, Ambassador Malinowski, Defense Attache and other Embassy officers visited one of Royal Nepal Army's (RNA) Civic Peace and Development Mobilization Committees (commonly referred to as "Village Defense Committees") located in Lamjung District (in a remote area northeast of Pokhara). The Village Defense Committee in Lamjung District is comprised of five villages with a RNA outpost located on a strategic ridge outside the village of Pasgaun. All five villages are populated exclusively by members of the Gurung ethnic group. This adds to the cohesiveness among the villagers. (Note: The network of villages has a total population 15,000 with a considerable number of retired Indian/British Gurkha residents. End Note.) The five-village network is located along a frequently-used Maoist route between the Maoist heartland in the western part of Nepal and Kathmandu. Fearing being identified by security forces as friendly to the Maoist cause, the five villages volunteered to be included in the RNA's pilot project. The Village Defense Committee in Lamjung has had one encounter with the Maoists in the past, but has not seen Maoists for at least two months.

[1](#)3. (C) Despite its name, the Village Defense Committee is not an armed paramilitary force. Rather, in this particular example, the Village Defense Committee seems to function like an early warning/neighborhood watch system. In Pasgaun, the village that Emboffs visited, four or five residents patrol nightly with dogs and alert security forces with light signals and runners if anything is out of the ordinary. The security forces patrol separately.

[1](#)4. (C) In Pasgaun, out of a population of 1500, about 70 to 80 residents participate in the Village Defense Committee. The head of the committee is a 70-year old retired Indian Gurkha officer, who also happens to be the village patriarch. He is assisted by two other retired Indian Gurkha soldiers. (COMMENT: Retired as the rank of a Warrant Officer Second Class, he still embarks on a three-day walk to Pokhara every month to collect his military pension check. He has fought in six wars, including the Sino-Indian War of 1962, Indian-Bangladeshi War in 1971 and in all the conflicts between India and Pakistan. END COMMENT.) The residents of Pasgaun indicated that committee members use their own six 12-bore shotgun rifles, which they have had licensed by the Government of Nepal to conduct patrols.

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COMMENT
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15. (C) There has been much debate within the NGO, international donor community and the GON on what the Village Defense concept means in practice. The Ambassador's visit to Lamgunj District Village Defense Committee was only the most recent effort by the Embassy to determine what, in fact, was being done to implement the village self-defense concept. Although definitely not a "one size fits all" model, the pilot project in Lamgunj does appear to function well. The five-village network in Lamjung may be unique, with a strategically important location and a cohesive and reliable network of trained ex-Gurkha soldiers. This model may be difficult to replicate in other villages. We will encourage the Government of Nepal to proceed cautiously and to find the best ways to build upon carefully identified villages' strengths. END COMMENT

(NOTE: A copy of a RNA brief describing the Village Defense Committee will be forwarded to Nepal's desk officer in SA/INS. END NOTE.)
MALINOWSKI